

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Āj* (Karachi) 20 (October–December 1995), 416 pp., Rs. 100; and 21 (January–March 1996), 416 pp., Rs. 100. Both issues edited by AJMAL KAMAL and ZEENAT HISAM.

THIS ANTHOLOGY on Karachi is a painstaking labor of love, an attempt to rescue the city from the kind of thinking that can lead only to despair. Its aim is to create some semblance of coherence and sense out of all the rhetoric of the last few years. But the study also reveals a depth of concern about the situation which is amazingly free of rancor and partisan sentimentality—a grace that one rarely comes across in Pakistani writings on the subject and almost never in Urdu literature and journalism.

The two issues of *Āj* are devoted to a unique socio-political study of Karachi, remarkable especially for its accounts of the travails and tribulations of the city. Appropriately, the first volume (Autumn 1995) of *Āj's Karāčī ki Kahānī* is prefaced by a quotation from Bogdan Bogdanovic's *The City and Death*:

Understanding the city implies loving the city and vice versa; we love what we understand and fear what we do not. New arrivals—and even long-time inhabitants—have difficulty relating emotionally to today's city, but not for want of goodwill. What can they offer their feelings to? Something that has so ceased to be a city that they cannot even see it clearly, perceive it as it should be perceived, identify it as such? Something they find harder and harder to “recreate” in their minds?...

Of course, Bogdanovic was speaking of his own city, Belgrade, but what he said could not be truer of today's Karachi. *Āj's* two-volume study attempts to bridge the gap that exists between the reality of Karachi and the problem of comprehending its reality, not only for the benefit of the mohajirs, but also for other “new arrivals”—the countless who have their homes in the north but have been coming to the city to make a living which only a big, vibrant and breathtakingly dynamic city like Karachi can offer. For the readers, *Āj* has attempted to open new avenues of perception.

The two volumes contain contributions from some 44 writers—thinkers, sociologists, environmentalists, anthropologists, journalists, creative writers, technocrats, historians—spanning the nearly two centuries during which Karachi has been transformed from an unpretentious dwelling of a modest community of fishermen, sailors and petty traders, to the present-day megropolis. On the face

of it, they may appear to be so many unrelated accounts of different phases of the city's history, but as Ajmal Kamal tells us in his thought-provoking Introduction, together they make a discernible pattern out of a kaleidoscope of the social, economic, political and—perhaps, most important of all—cultural factors that have gone into the making of today's Karachi.

We see Karachi as a composite whole with all its beauty, charm and magnetism, but without overlooking the nagging sense of deprivation, insecurity and terror which it holds out for large segments of its sprawling population. Some of the contributions take a detached, almost clinical view, while several others speak of Karachi with a deep sense of involvement. But all the pieces, one way or the other, seem to be motivated by an abiding love and hope for the city that has become an inalienable part of their existence.

Accounts of the earliest period of Karachi's history have been provided through excerpts from the chronicles of Naomal Hotchand, John Brunton, Kewalram Ratanmal Malkani, and some others who deal with Sindh's conquest and colonization by the British and its impact on Karachi. Karachi's transition into a modern seaport and metropolis—which served as a strategic staging post for the Allied armies during the Second World War, and is now the lifeline of Pakistan—has been reconstructed from memoirs left behind by, among others, Pir Ali Mohammad Rashdi, Dayaram Gidumal, Lokram Dodeja, Sohrab Katrak and Jamshed Nusserwanji (as recalled by Kewal Motwani). For the contemporary reader, they are all precious gems of memories, recorded with engaging sincerity, first-hand or through narrators or interpreters. What we see is a comprehensive, thoroughly integrated, and fascinating compendium of ideas, events and happenings, beginning with the advent of British imperialism and taking us through times when Karachi was in search of its true identity within the larger context of Sindh (after separation from Bombay) and the experience of Partition.

History is important not only because no society can flush the past out of its system, but also because it is important to evolve a shared perception of the past, and to try to understand the present in its perspective. As Ajmal Kamal reminds us—it would be naïve to believe that we did not need to be reminded—the history of Karachi did not begin in 1947, nor can the flow of history be dammed at any one particular date in history. To make the view of the present more confusing, many thinkers and writers tend to be too selective about their facts while dealing with Karachi's past; they relate only what fits into their preconceived notions and discard anything that detracts from them. It is only when we are mentally prepared to accept the reality that an objective study of the past paints, and evolve from it a composite picture of the present, that we can begin to understand the myriad problems that confront us today. If we confine our view of Karachi to a prism of bias and prejudice fixed on any single factor such as ethnicity—which has dominated most writers' thinking, whether they support the mohajirs' point of view or the Sindhi nationalists' standpoint—we are bound to fail in the effort to grasp the reality. An objective study, such as the one *Āj* offers,

has to steer clear of this trap.

For an understanding of the complexities which Karachi faces today, the account of Pir Ali Mohammad Rashdi is perhaps of primary importance. The excerpt opens with the candid statement that Karachi as he once knew it is no more; almost all the milestones of the past have been obliterated by the tide of history, and what now remains are “a few old, dilapidated dwellings, with their windows ‘adorned’ by shabby, freshly-washed linen....”

With his unmatched skill as a journalist and politician, Pir Sahib goes on to give us a blow-by-blow account of the evolution of Muslim politics in Sindh, beginning with the early years of the century. In the process, he identifies the people and personalities who played significant roles in their own time. Incidentally, he also recalls with great love many of the physical features of Karachi which now lie ruined, buried in the past. He presents the reader with cameos, not only of the leading characters in the game of politics, but also of several of the minor ones. In the absence of what he has told us, who would ever have remembered that it was Mir Ayub Khan, one of the Jams of Lasbela, who had been a moving spirit behind the Sindh Mohammadan Association and the Sindh Mohammadan Educational Conference, as well as the Muslim League in its nascent stage, and who, because of his deep affection for Urdu and Persian literature, established the first branch of the Anjuman-e Taraqqī-e Urdū in Sindh? An almost parallel account of Hindu politics in Sindh of the same period is to be found in Nagendra Nath Gupta’s essay on the life and work of Dayaram Gidumal. Gupta too was a journalist and first arrived in Karachi in 1884.

The piece on Jamshed Nusserwanji by Kewal Motwani is too short to do justice to the memory of a most cultured, versatile, enterprising and dedicated personality who was one of the master-builders of present-day Karachi, and who, through his personal initiative and generosity, created a modern metropolis. Motwani has summed up his view of Nusserwanji in the following words: “Gifted with an inexhaustible stamina for public service, Jamshed’s life was like an unending symphony, the finest manifestation of yoga, an unmatched genius....”

But what would probably interest readers even more are the contributions of contemporary writers like Akhtar Hameed Khan, Arif Hasan, Tasneem Siddiqui, Akbar Zaidi, Asif Farrukhi, Zeenat Hisam, and Mohammad Hanif, who have given first-hand accounts of what Karachi has gone through in recent years and who have in many ways worked for the alleviation of the sufferings of the city’s citizens with total sincerity and dedication. Akhtar Hameed Khan’s “The Art of Living” presents a detailed account of the Orangi Pilot Project, with which he has been associated from its inception. It is an amazing story of how a *kačči ābādī* can be transformed into an integrated, highly productive, forward-looking community, mostly through self-help and the guidance of a few dedicated community leaders. The evolution of a similar, though considerably smaller, settlement, Isa Nagri, which has been home mainly to members of a minority

community, has been provided by seven narrators—Benjamin Anthony Sharif Soz, Liaquat Munawwar, Baxter Bhatti, Nasreen Stephenson, Asif Shahbaz, and Mahbub Khan, who have lived in it and experienced the travails that have been inevitable for survival and progress. The struggle by the inhabitants of Orangi and Isa Nagri to make something of their lives continues, with their morale sustained by their own determination and hard work, and by the goodwill of some social workers.

Dr. Akbar Zaidi, an eminent economist, formerly associated with the Applied Economic Research Centre, presents a well-argued and well-substantiated analysis of the factors contributing to the estrangement between the Sindhis and the mohajirs. He has meticulously dealt with the economic and social factors that have contributed to this alienation, but is of the view that the hatred and militancy is primarily the result of the exploitation of the situation by certain vested interests. He feels that there could not be any natural clash of interests between the Sindhis and the mohajirs, but that there could be a clash between the Sindhis and the exploitative élite dominating the power centers. He commends the magazines *Herald* and *Newsline* for having made a number of bold disclosures that support his theory. In addition, he rules out the possibility of a division of Sindh along ethnic lines and strongly believes that unless the democratic process is sabotaged, the present tensions should eventually dissipate. However, meaningful participation of the different segments of the Sindhi population in policy-making is a *sine qua non* for any resolution of the continuing problem.

A fascinating aspect of *Āj*'s two-volume study of Karachi is the contribution of creative writers—such as Shaikh Ayaz, Fehmida Riaz, Zeenat Hisam, Asif Farrukhi, and Asad Muhammad Khan—who have skillfully dissected the social and cultural milieu of Karachi to expose the machinations and manipulations of the vested interests in reducing the people to their present sense of despair and deprivation. A proper evaluation of the role that creative writers can play in preserving or destroying the social, cultural and ethical values of a society would merit much more space than a mere review provides. Mention must, however, be made of the Swedish drama specialist Sigrid Kahle, who spent a few years in Karachi in the early '50s trying to motivate and train a group of young Pakistani men and women to present plays with a social content, and to use the stage as a source for bringing about social change and progress.

Zeenat Hisam and Ajmal Kamal fully deserve the gratitude of readers of Urdu for making available to them a perspective on Karachi that would otherwise be available only by plodding through volumes of literature available only in English and, to some extent, in Sindhi. The effort that has gone into both the selection and editing of the material as well as the translation from English and Sindhi must have required almost superhuman stamina, to say nothing of a dedication to the ideal of creating an environment of harmony and peace in a city torn by senseless dissensions.

The story of Karachi compiled by *Āj* should be compulsory reading for all those who believe that Karachi is a hopeless, burnt-out case. □

—M.H. ASKARI  
Columnist, Karachi

[Gratefully reproduced from *The Herald* (June 1996), pp. 160–62; edited for the *AUS*.]

*An Anthology of Urdu Verse in English*. Selected and translated by DAVID MATTHEWS. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995. 136 pp. Rs. 250.

URDU POETRY presents an unusual picture within India's literary scene, in the sense that while in almost all other Indian languages fiction predominates, in Urdu, poetry still retains pride of place. The reason may be the deep rapport the poets have always enjoyed with their audience. While in other languages poetry has become largely an intellectual exercise limited to a section of literary élites, Urdu poetry still enjoys a wide readership/listenership. People live it—involuntarily and effortlessly. Thus despite rapid urbanization, industrialization, social transformation, expatriation, etc., Urdu poetry has lost none of its mass appeal. Poetic assemblies (*mushā'iras*) continue to be a common feature not only of the Subcontinent, but of the global Indian diaspora as well, where people gather, often traveling long distances, to listen to their favorite poets. This is one aspect which continues to fascinate the admirers of Urdu poetry.

As a response to this wide popularity of Urdu poetry, several notable anthologies of translated Urdu verse—both by native speakers of Urdu and English—have appeared in the last few years. (These are aside from the pioneering translations of Ghalib and Faiz by Yusuf Husain, V.G. Kiernan and Aijaz Ahmad in the 1970s.) Mention may be made of *An Anthology of Modern Urdu Poetry* by Baidar Bakht and Kathleen Grant Jaeger (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1984), *The Penguin Book of Modern Urdu Poetry* by Mahmood Jamal (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1986), *A Listening Game* by Frances W. Pritchett (London: Lokmaya Press, 1987), *The Rebel's Silhouette* by Agha Shahid Ali (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), *Masterpieces of Urdu Ghazal* by K.C. Kanda (Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1992), and *Poems of Faiz Ahmad Faiz* by Mohammad Zakir and M.N. Menai (Delhi: M.D. Publications, 1995). A noteworthy recent addition to this body of literature is Shiv K. Kumar's translation *Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (Delhi: Viking Penguin, 1995).

A translated work always invites comparison with whatever preceded it in the same field, and should be evaluated accordingly. Considered in this perspective, David Matthew's *An Anthology of Urdu Verse in English* seems rather inadequate, more in terms of concept, selection, and organization than in the quality

of translation. Making all allowances for the personal predilections and preferences of the translator-compiler (to which he alludes in his Introduction), one still feels that the collection is neither representative of the best poets “who lived between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries,” nor are the poems selected invariably the best ones. For instance, how can an anthology of Urdu verse be complete without including Miraji, Firaq, N.M. Rashed, and Akhtarul Iman (who is represented in the present work by three stray couplets)? Besides, the arrangement of the poems on the basis of themes like “Professions of Faith,” “Memories,” “Disillusion and Sadness,” “The Beauty of the World,” “Women!,” etc., seems rather puerile. Then, even under those themes, the poets have not been presented chronologically. For example, Iqbal figures before Quli Qutb Shah, and Mir Anis figures after Faiz Ahmed Faiz in “Professions of Faith”; Faiz precedes Ghalib and Momin in “Memories”; and so on. This leaves the reader rather confused about the evolution of poetry in Urdu. Further, Matthews gives his own titles to the ghazals in translation. Ghazals are traditionally left untitled by the poets who compose them. Giving one’s own titles to them would amount to circumscribing their meanings and rich ambiguity, thereby prejudicing the reader in a certain way.

After this carping, one may concentrate on the merits of the present anthology. It has a good Introduction, which will help readers appreciate the special flavor and delicate nuances of Urdu poetry. For readers who wish to delve deeper, this reviewer recommends Marion Molteno’s seminal essay, “Approaching Urdu Poetry,” included in Ralph Russell’s *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992). As far as the actual translation of the poems is concerned, it is debatable whether verse translation in English can adequately render the import of the original, despite the sacrifices one must make for the sake of a particular scheme of meter, rhyme, and/or rhythm. Matthews says in his Introduction that he has “endeavoured to find a suitable verse form, being careful not to stray from the original text,” but one knows the near-impossibility of the task. Equivalent verse forms for Urdu, particularly for the ghazal, just do not exist in English, and hence there have been deviations, additions, and deletions here and there. For example, on p. 75, he renders Mir’s line “*nā haq ham majbūrōn par yeh tuhmat hai mukhtārī kī*” (We the helpless are wrongly accused of free will) as: “You say that I am free; that is unjust. / For I am forced to hear your accusation.” Here an impersonal statement has been rendered into a direct form of address, totally changing the tonality of the original and adding far too many things (“You say,” “For I am forced to hear”) which are not there in the original. On p. 29, Matthews translates Ghalib’s couplet “*nīnd uskī hai dimāgh uskā hai rātēn uskī haiñ / tēri zulfēn jiskē bāzū par parēshān hō ga’īn*” as: “To him come sleep and self-respect, to him belong the nights / The one on whom you spread your locks, the one / who rests with you.” Obviously, in the last line “the one / who rests with you” is an addition on the part of the translator for the sake of rhyme. Besides, the translator totally forgets the word “*bāzū*”

(arm) on which the beloved spreads her locks. On p. 59, Matthews's rendering of Faiz's line "tēri āṅk'ōṅ kē sivā duniyā mēṅ rakk'hā kyā hai" (What did the world hold out for me except your charming looks?) as: "And in creation there was nothing more than your bright eyes" is very feeble, to say the least. But barring these instances, David Matthews has been able to produce, by and large, quite lucid translations. His rendering of Anis and Sauda in particular is quite competent.

Finally, for a 136-page book, the price is certainly on the high side. □

—M. ASADUDDIN

*Jamia Millia Islamia*

[Reproduced, with thanks, from *Indian Review of Books* (Madras), 16 November–15 December 1995, p. 53; edited for the *AUS*.]

ABDUL BISMILLAH. *The Song of the Loom*. Translated from the Hindi by RASHMI GOVIND. Delhi: Macmillan, 1996. 264 pp. Rs. 140.

MEETING ABDUL BISMILLAH is a pleasant experience. Always cheerful, he regales his listeners with jokes and anecdotes about different strata of people in Benaras, the famed holy city, rattling off idioms and proverbs that have the very feel of the earth, and reciting verses in his rhythmic voice from the Ramayana, the Qur'an, Kalidasa and Ghalib with equal felicity. He commands an intimate knowledge of the Hindu and Muslim scriptures and ways of life. This has given him a unique vantage point to explore with penetrating insight the ethos and strifes of both communities, as is evident from his short stories and novels.

The novel's original title in Hindi, *Jhīnī Jhīnī Bīnī Cadariyā*, is from Kabir, epitomizing the quotidian activities of the Julahas, i.e., the Muslim weaver community of Benaras, which is the staple of the novel. It is divided into two main parts—the warp (*tānā*) and the weft (*bānā*). These terms also serve as binding metaphors for the two parts, and both give the materials a certain structure and contribute to their significance. The second part also contains what the writer calls a "Kshepak," a sort of short interlude where the novelist self-consciously draws attention to his own peculiar and unenviable position as the chronicler of the weaver's life.

Published in Hindi in 1986 and set in the Muslim neighborhoods of Benaras somewhere between the seventies and early eighties, the novel explores the life and working conditions of Muslim weavers of the famed Benarsi sari. As a distinct occupational group the Julahas of northern India have never enjoyed a decent status in the social hierarchy and are condemned to live a life of poverty and deprivation, while the middlemen gobble up the major part of the profit. Matin, the protagonist, is a skilled weaver, but his talent is not recognized, much

less accorded appreciation, by the rich Haji who exploits the weavers, paying them a pittance which is just enough to keep them at subsistence level. To remedy this Matin endeavors to found a cooperative society of small weavers, but his plans are thwarted by Haji Amirullah, the master-weaver-cum-trader who sets up a cooperative himself by using forged signatures. Matin not only loses his loom but is also compelled to work as a hired laborer for Haji Amirullah. In desperation he leaves Benaras for Mau.

The introduction of the power loom, coupled with the scarcity of raw materials and rise in silk prices, compound the misery of the weavers. They mobilize themselves as the traders arbitrarily begin both to pay them in postdated checks and to subject them to equally whimsical price deductions. Matin finds working conditions in Mau no better and so returns to Benaras. The stark contrast between the weavers' miserable existence and the splendor of their silk saris stands out as the main theme. Matin's son Iqbal's question as to why his mother does not possess a single silk sari serves as a leitmotif throughout the novel and is echoed in another question: "Matin, how can it be that such beautiful flowers come alive on the sari while you are standing with your feet in the pit?" Iqbal, imbued with communist ideology, organizes a weavers' strike, which is their first act of self-assertion. The novel ends here and the weavers' struggle remains inconclusive. Coincidentally, the novel proved prophetic: within a year of its publication the weavers in Benaras went on a prolonged strike which accomplished some slight amelioration of their unenviable lot.

Despite the decidedly socialist stance of the narrator, the narrative itself never lapses into propaganda. Bismillah prefers "showing" rather than "telling." The ironic, tongue-in-cheek tone adopted by the narrator helps him delve deep into the realities of the weavers' lives with a measure of both involvement and detachment. The whole ethos of the community, with its beliefs, superstitions, prejudices, rituals, etc., comes alive, interwoven in the narrative texture. The dexterity with which Bismillah uses the weavers' speech—a mixture of Karkhandari Urdu and Purabia Hindi (peculiar to the community and not easily understood even by the people of Benaras), with all its inflections, earthiness, and colorful abuses and idioms—contributes to the appeal of the novel.

The translation of such a text—rooted in a particular locale and culture—offers formidable problems. Sadly, the angularities, inflections, and local flavor of the original have been flattened out in the English, resulting in inevitable losses. Rashmi Govind's rendition of the work in standard English lacks the warmth, immediacy and colloquialism of the original. Perhaps that was unavoidable. I would like, however, to draw attention to certain avoidable lapses. First, the translation could have been made crisper and more precise, rather than overly expository. Second, it is not clear why Rauf Chacha has been translated as Rauf Uncle, which changes the whole register, while all other "chachas" in the novel have been retained in their original incarnation. Third, the transliteration of Arabic, even Hindi/Urdu, words appears faulty; for instance, *peelee kothi*,



*akhaaraa, aazaan, Gharib Nivaaz, taaziya, Naar-e-taqbeer, burqua*, etc. Fourth, even the spelling of sari is not consistent—sometimes it is “sari,” at other times, “saree.” Fifth, certain common, even famous Muslim names have been rendered inaccurately. For instance, Aamina, Aleemun, Allamaa Iqbaal, Altaafur Rahmaan, Saagar Nizaami, etc. Such infelicities are the result of editorial sloth no doubt, but they also serve as a sad reminder of the kind of cultural isolation in which we live—an isolation which, ironically, the translation of texts is supposed to bridge. However, it is commendable that the MRAR Educational Society and Macmillan have attended to the timely task of taking the Indian classics beyond their respective linguistic confines. They would do well, however, to ensure a more rigorous standard of translation and editorial competence if they intend their translations to endure. □

—M. ASADUDDIN  
*Jamia Millia Islamia*

[Reproduced, with thanks, from *Indian Review of Books* (Madras), 16 May–15 June 1996, pp. 11–12; edited for the *AUS*.]

FAIZ AHMED FAIZ. *The Rebel's Silhouette: Selected Poems*. Translated and with a new Introduction by AGHA SHAHID ALI. Rev. ed. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995. xxvi, 102 pp.

FOR A WHILE, it was hard for me to decide which hat I was finally going to wear in order to assess this revised edition of Agha Shahid Ali's translations of Faiz. I had my academic's hat: wearing this one I paid close attention to issues of translational fidelity and freedom, to the *process* of translation, here in terms of a canonical Faiz, Urdu grammar, and a resultant English that, in the inevitably arduous effort of bearing-across, hopefully distorted the Urdu as little as possible. But I also had my (more comfortable) poetry-fan hat: wearing this one I was much less concerned with translation as a process of some sort applied to the original Urdu poems, and was much more willing to approach the English translations as poems in their own right, letting them say whatever they might. Wearing this latter hat my trip through Agha Sahib's book was a journey of sheer delight. His translations are themselves beautiful poetry. But to my mild surprise (since I was not very familiar with Agha Sahib's work, and since I am generally not very pleased with translated poetry if I can read the original language) wearing my critical hat the journey was no less delightful. At the level simply of the beauty of Agha Sahib's English, his book is a thundering success. But when one bears in mind that this English-borne beauty is itself the result of a translational process, when one compares the English beauty to the Urdu beauty and starts to

uncover repeatable *ways* in which the English beauty accrues, one must be critically struck as well by Agha Sahib's fidelity to Faiz's Urdu. Fidelity certainly in spirit, but also, in some intriguing and not very obvious ways, in letter as well.

It is standard practice to discuss translation in terms of "original" and "target" languages, and this will be productive here, too, but only as a point of entrance. For given Urdu poetics and the associative meaning-generation referred to as *ma'nī-āfrīnī*, it is difficult (especially regarding Faiz) to locate "an" original Urdu at all. At the artificially truncated level of any isolated poem (perhaps not so artificial for an English-only readership), the images and figures of Faiz's poetry are no more than what they appear to be; but at a deeper level and especially for a readership familiar with Urdu poetry, these images and figures would not exist at all were it not for the centuries of Perso-Urdu poetic tradition in which they were forged, polished, presented, and reworked. The simple mention of any of these figures in a poem reaches out to and embraces the tradition. The "lover," the "beloved," the "rival," the "garden", etc. are all figures normalized throughout the long tradition of Perso-Urdu poetics, all with more or less discrete ambits of meaning and admissible context. Such traditional figures, then, having grown up with each other, may interact with and refer to each other within a poem without any explicit indication that they are doing so. Furthermore, a poet like Faiz may take these figures and create poetry that, over and above tradition but in no way discarding it, imbues them with an utterly new internal logic of interaction and reference. The translator then has the "original" Urdu substrate of poetic tradition to contend with, but also a newer "original" born of the reworking of the original "original." How to make "target" English of any of this?

Although Agha Sahib doesn't address the problems of translation in just these terms, he does nonetheless discuss them at some length in his Introduction, newly written for this revised edition of the book. Not unlike his translations, much of what he writes in his Introduction deceptively appears simple, but in actuality can only be the end result of much labor. For instance, he takes us by way of example through his translation of one of Faiz's *she'rs*:

*ik furṣat-e gunāh milī, voh b<sup>h</sup>i čār dīn*  
*dēk<sup>h</sup>ē haiñ ham nē ḥauṣlē parvardegār kē* (p. 6)

This he translates literally as:

Got an occasion to sin, that too for only four days.  
I've seen the courage of God Almighty. (p. xxiii)

For an English-only readership unfamiliar with Urdu poetry, the motion of the couplet, the sense of reversal and completion accomplished by the second line, and the intense irony this generates would all be lost in the wooden stasis of the

literal translation. Something that precisely vivifies the Urdu is thus wholly absent in the literalized English. Agha Sahib simply and aptly identifies his main problem as a translator of Faiz: “I had to fill in the elliptical moments...” (*ibid.*). And it is this “filling in” where Agha Sahib’s lifelong internalization of Faiz’s poetry (discussed in his Introduction) meets his expansive and fluid poetic sensibility. The results are always at least good, and usually very near perfect. Strategically departing from the original’s constraints of rhyme and meter, he “fills in the elliptical moments” of the *she’r* like this:

You made it so brief our time on earth  
its exquisite sins this sensation Oh Almighty  
of forgetting you  
    We know how vulnerable you are  
    We know you are a coward God (*ibid.*)

In the Urdu, such elliptical moments are not simply silent; they *are* articulated somehow within the delicate interactions of the words, but just are not concretely expressed in the words themselves. There is an orienting logic of allusion and reference that the words themselves cannot contain. This constitutes a great deal of the involving beauty of Urdu poetry in general, and of Faiz’s poetry in particular. *Finding* concrete expression in English for these articulate silences is where Agha-the-poet so wonderfully serves Agha-the-translator. This English stanza may not represent precisely what the words of Faiz’s *she’r* mean, but it certainly expresses what they *say*. This, then, was Agha Sahib’s task: to articulate in an English poetic medium what the Urdu poems *say*—apparent silences, elliptical moments, and all.

*The Rebel’s Silhouette* is an outstanding translational effort. With the Urdu originals on the facing pages, it is pure delight reading Agha Sahib’s liquid renditions and then comparing them to Faiz’s poems. Frequently astonishing, never pedestrian, and always engaging, Agha Shahid Ali has rendered both Urdu- and English-wallahs a tremendous service. □

—G.A. CHAUSSÉE

*University of Wisconsin–Madison*

*Fire and the Rose: An Anthology of Modern Urdu Poetry.* Edited and translated by ANISUR RAHMAN. Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1996. 354 pp. Rs. 395.

THERE HAS BEEN a welcome spurt in the translation of Urdu poetry in the last decade, which speaks of its burgeoning popularity and widening horizons. *Fire and the Rose* is an impressive addition to this growing body of literature; it offers

a glimpse of a poetic treasure hitherto confined only to those born to the language. Edited and translated by Professor Anisur Rahman, the anthology presents forty-five modern poets from India and Pakistan, representing various trends throughout the last sixty years. It is more representative and clearly focused than *The Penguin Book of Urdu Poetry* (1986), edited and translated by Mehmood Jamal, or *An Anthology of Urdu Verse in English* (Oxford University Press, 1995), selected and translated by David Matthews. Besides these, quite a few other collections based on single poets, most notably on Faiz Ahmad Faiz, N.M. Rashed, Saqi Farooqi, and Akhtarul Iman have made their appearance, and Rahman's version inevitably will be compared with others for determining its merit. However, it must be pointed out at the outset that *Fire and the Rose* is an anthology based exclusively on the Urdu *nazm*, as was the Penguin anthology before it. The ghazal, traditionally the most popular poetic form in Urdu, remains outside the purview of this selection.

The keyword, as far as the present selection is concerned, is "modern." In the Introduction, Rahman speaks at length of the modern poetic tradition in Urdu, where individual poets draw upon sources both indigenous and foreign, literary and extra-literary, including science, philosophy, the social sciences, and mythology, and make new experiments in language and poetic form. The tone is set by the first poem, "Katba" (Epitaph; p. 2), which is strikingly modern in form and content. The poets of the Progressive Writers' Movement of the 1930s have been represented in their full glory here, and they serve as a take-off point for Rahman, as their insistence on ideology and impatience with the credo "Art for Art's sake" (reminiscent of the British poets of more or less the same period) altered the complexion of Urdu poetry in unprecedented ways by bringing about a total change in the poets' preoccupations and idiom. Taseer's couplet in his poem "Landan kī ēk Shām" (An Evening in London)—"*ṣanamkadōñ mēñ ujālē nahīñ rahē keh jō thē / keh ab voh dēk<sup>h</sup>nēvālē nahīñ rahē keh jō thē*" (p. 8) ("no longer do I see the light that glowed here once / no longer do I find the faces that showed here once" (p. 10)—speaks of the twilight period marking the decay of the older tradition. A characteristically new way of looking at the world becomes more and more manifest through the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Makhdoom Mohiuddin, Ali Sardar Jafri, Kaifi Azmi and Sahir Ludhianvi. It is a marvel of sorts that despite their commitment to Marxism, some of these poets could wed politics and art so deftly in their finer work so as to afford the reader an experience of a different kind altogether. Here one feels tempted to conjecture that it has something to do with the expressive power of the Urdu language—its rich poetic tradition overlaid with culture-specific metaphors and symbols, its inherent rhythm and lyricism that are almost impossible to carry over in translation, most of all into English.

Contemporaneous with the Progressives was the Ḥalqa-e Arbāb-e Žauq, a group that served as a counterpoint to the professed social commitment of the former. Two incomparably fine poets—N.M. Rashed and Miraji—represent this

group. To some, including Rahman, N.M. Rashed is the first modernist poet in Urdu, a greater poet than Faiz, perhaps, though not as popular. His “Mujhē Vidā‘ Kar” (Bid Me Farewell; pp. 24–31) certainly towers above other poems included in the anthology in its tumultuous sweep and sinuous rhythm. Miraji, steeped in both the Sanskrit tradition and the French symbolists, wrote a kind of poetry that forms a class by itself. Another poet, outside the pale of so-called schools and groups, is Akhtarul Iman, justifiably regarded as the greatest living Urdu poet. It is doubtful whether the four poems selected here are really representative of Akhtarul Iman and do justice to his genius. The editor may have been constrained by issues of translatability, as Akhtarul Iman is deeply rooted in Eastern culture and tradition, deriving therefrom his metaphors—of which he makes extensive use.

The generation of poets since 1950 has been represented by (among others) Muneer Niazi, Saqi Farooqi, Zahid Dar, Munibur Rahman, Shahryar, Mohammad Alvi, Baqer Mehdi, and Nida Fazli. Realism, symbolism, surrealism, existentialism—everything is here in “God’s plenty,” some of which may elude even the most discerning reader. Here the challenge to the translator must have been less daunting, since the existential concerns of the modernists are more or less the same, and they speak in an idiom largely shared by the cognoscenti everywhere. For instance, the title of Baqer Mehdi’s poem, “Godot,” creates familiar echoes and reverberations in the mind of the informed reader and predisposes him to the experience described; consequently the poem attains significance by deftly playing upon the experiences of the European writer:

*batā’ūn kis sē keh main muntazir hūn jis din kā  
voh shāyad ab na kabhī ā’egā zamānē mēn  
kahān peh hai mirā “gōdō” mujhē khabar hī nahīn  
usē main d̥h̄ūnd̄-čukā rūm aur landan mēn (p. 150)*  
To whom shall I say  
the day I wait for will never come now.  
I don’t know where my Godot is,  
I’ve searched for him in Rome and London (p. 151)

Needless to say, this poetry appeals inevitably only to a small group of serious readers.

A major highlight of the present anthology is the poetry of women poets, among whom Fehmida Reyaz, Kishwar Naheed, Nasreen Anjum Bhatti, Sara Shagufta, Azra Abbas, and Shaista Habib represent the best of feminist poetry in Urdu. The frame of reference and the world view one encounters here are totally different. They speak of poignant feminine experiences, their subjective terrors and tensions, in a voice wholly their own. If Fehmida Reyaz’s “Lā’ō Hāt<sup>h</sup> Apnā Lā’ō Žarā” (Come, Give Me Your Hand) speaks of maternal longing with quiet confidence, Kishwar Naheed’s “Tisrē Darjēvālōn kī Pahli Žarūrat” (First Needs of

the Third Class Citizens)—starting with “*bōlnā hamārī zarūrat hai / čāhē, zamīn mēn muñḥ dē-kar hī kyūn na bōlnā paṛē*” (p. 264) (“Speaking is our necessity / whether we speak licking the dust”; p. 265)—foregrounds feminist discourse powerfully right in the beginning of the poem. And Shaista Habib’s “*Main Sublime Nahīn Hō Saktī*” (I Cannot Be Sublime) jolts one to the realization that all the assumptions—indeed, the whole ethos—of the earlier period are under searching scrutiny. Behind the dismissive and tongue-in-cheek tenor of the narrative voice lies a subversive undercurrent, and the reader is transported to a tragic vision as the poem reaches its end:

*mujḥ kō tō apnī zāt kā nasha hai  
aur main apnē vujūd par ‘āshiq hūn  
jis mēn ānsū’ōn kī al-kuḥal rač-bas ga’ī hai  
ā’ō, apnē apnē vujūdōn sē ṭakrā kar yeh jān pī’ēn  
jām tamām ‘āshiqōn kī muḥabbat kē  
jō sublime nahīn hō saktē* (p. 328)  
I am drunk on the love of my being  
and I adore my existence  
in which is dissolved the alcohol of tears.  
Come let’s clink our beings and drink this cup  
in the name of all those lovers  
who cannot be sublime. (p. 329)

As far as the English translation is concerned, Rahman has been able by and large to convey a feel of the original, staying loyal to it and resisting the temptation to transcreate. In some cases—notably Kaifi Azmi’s poem—he has admirably recreated the rhythm and music of the original. However, quite a few blemishes have crept in. These pertain to lapses in idiom, literalism or plain and simple usage (like “stitching the wounds” for “*zakhm sīnā*” [p. 31], “Lingers back” [p. 95], and “more farther” [p. 147]) that hamper readability.

On p. 11, the phrase “nor seek release” in the eighth line does not make any sense. The noun form of the verb “seek” is needed for any communication to take place. Then there are too many reflexives, as is evident from the line “You’re kind to me yourself, yourself you withdrew from me” (p. 87). In the same poem the phrase “traditional hell” for “*rivāyatī sitam*” will only mystify a reader not acquainted with Urdu and make him or her wonder what is happening here. In the poem, “*Ēk Laṛkī*,” the word “*mittī*”—recurring often and contributing significantly to the meaning of the poem—could have been more fruitfully translated as “earth” or “clay,” rather than “soil”. Further, lines like “who walked held high his head / had his head hacked” (p. 197), and “if something, I’m for her” (p. 231), seem jarring to the ear. Then, Rahman has eliminated some of the ellipses (pp. 99, 100, 166) in his translation. Granting the fact that Urdu poets are not always meticulous about punctuation, one feels that these ellipses should have been

retained, because poetry speaks as much through pauses and silences as through words. A more serious lapse is the unwarranted omission of small chunks of text in the English translation—the line “*abr sē būnd pānī kī*” (p.138) in Gilani Kamran’s poem “Rāt kā Ākhri Pahr,” for example. There are a few more. I hope the editor and the publisher will take all this into account and correct the inadequacies in the next edition of the book.

The anthology is strong on organization. The lucid and comprehensive Introduction and biographical notes prepare the reader sufficiently for a proper appreciation of the varied terrain covered, the titles of the poems have been translated imaginatively, and the beautiful Urdu calligraphy on the facing pages is a visual delight. Rahman is modest enough to convey through his epigraph that he has endeavored to present a waterjar to those who cannot go to the fountain. But the anthology will certainly whet the thirst of quite a few who would feel tempted to reach the fountain. □

—M. ASADUDDIN

*Jamia Millia Islamia*

[Reproduced, with thanks, from *Indian Review of Books* (Madras), 16 April–15 May 1996, pp. 43–45; edited for the *AUS*.]

*Hidden in the Lute: An Anthology of Two Centuries of Urdu Literature.* Selected and edited by RALPH RUSSELL. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1995. 312 pp. Rs. 250.

RALPH RUSSELL’S RELATIONSHIP with Urdu began about five decades ago when he was a British army officer in India. His sustained interest in Urdu literature has been quite productive in terms of his own literary output. After several notable books and many articles, he is now justifiably regarded as one of the foremost Western scholars of Urdu.

Russell taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London University for more than thirty years. Before taking up a lectureship at SOAS, he spent a year in India at Aligarh in 1949–50. The stay at Aligarh was fruitful because of its rich cultural and literary milieu, as well as his association with Khurshidul Islam, an incomparably fine scholar of Urdu humanities, who became his lifelong friend and collaborator. Before leaving for England in 1950, Russell delivered a talk in Delhi which gave one an idea of the mission he would undertake for the rest of his life:

[T]here is much in Urdu literature which English-speaking readers could immediately appreciate if they could read it in English translation. I hope

in future when I have acquired sufficient competence that I, with other English speakers who will learn Urdu from me, will be able to undertake the work of producing good, readable translations.

As teacher of Urdu at SOAS, Russell endeavored to impart to his students a comprehensive understanding of the culture through a study of Urdu literature and language. In a note prepared for his students in 1974, he wrote:

[A]s you yourself will soon come to feel, you cannot study Urdu satisfactorily without acquiring more knowledge about the people who speak it—of their history, culture and social life and of the countries where they live.

If one keeps the above in mind, the relevance of his anthology, *Hidden in the Lute*, and its objectives can be properly understood and evaluated. Though anthologies—mostly bilingual—have been prepared before by faculty members at SOAS, the Universities of Chicago and Wisconsin–Madison in the U.S., McGill University in Canada, and elsewhere, chiefly for the limited purpose of classroom instruction in Urdu, the present anthology is the most comprehensive of its kind in English. It will certainly be of great help to non-Urdu readers, in India and elsewhere, who desire a preliminary yet clearly focused understanding of Urdu literature and the values, the milieu, and the ethos that inform it.

The anthology has been arranged under six broad headings: Stories and Sketches, Popular Literature, Love Poetry, The Challenge of the “New Light,” Poets and the Poetic Tradition, and The Novel. There is a prefatory note preceding each section, mapping out the terrain covered and elucidating the assumptions and underpinnings necessary for a proper appreciation of the section. The first section contains short stories by Premchand, Ismat Chughtai, Krishan Chander and Manto, a play by Rashid Jahan, a lively extract from Shaukat Thanavi’s autobiography, and a biographical sketch of her brother by Ismat Chughtai. Though one has seen some of these translations elsewhere, the section as a whole makes sense, as it presents a broad spectrum in terms of content and style. The annotations to Rashid Jahan’s play, *Behind the Veil*, explore the whole gamut of complex family relationships in South Asia. In fact, the annotations throughout the book are helpful and enlightening, and speak of the meticulous effort that has gone into preparing them.

The next section, devoted to popular literature, also presents a varied fare. First, we have the cycle of humorous stories associated with Akbar and Birbal, Mullah Dopiaza, and Sheikh Chilli. Then we have a chapter relating small anecdotes in the lives of prophets and great men, followed by two chapters from *Qaṣaṣ-ul Anbiyā’* by Ghulam Nabi, dealing with the creation of Adam, the fall of Satan, the loss of paradise, etc. The section ends with a lively radio talk by Khwaja Hasan Nizami written largely in the style of the essays of Addison and Steele. The merit of this section lies in its endeavor to put forth commonly held beliefs, superstitions, conventions, myths, and rituals that together form the



cultural backdrop of an entire people. One only wishes that Russell had included the description of a *majlis* and an *'urs*, which have long been important ingredients in popular culture, as well as giving sustenance to certain forms of poetry in Urdu.

The section “Love Poetry” deals with relevant aspects of a major part of Urdu poetry that pertains to love—both secular and divine. This is oft-trod terrain for Russell, who has already co-authored books with Khurshidul Islam such as *Three Mughal Poets* (1968) and *Ghalib: Life and Letters* (1969). His neat summing up and authorial comments lead the reader through the subtle and often seemingly incomprehensible cluster of images, symbols and cultural assumptions. Here he translates eleven of Ghalib’s ghazals, and his translation of the following couplets is the finest one has ever come across in terms of the musicality and form of the ghazal.

*bāzīcā-e atfāl hai duniyā mirē āgē*  
*hōtā hai shab-o-rōz tamāshā mirē āgē*

*mat pūcḥ keh kyā hāl hai mērā tirē piḥḥē*  
*tū dēkḥ keh kyā raṅg hai tērā mirē āgē*

*imān mujḥē rōkē hai, jō kḥēñcē hai mujḥē kufr*  
*ka'ba mirē piḥḥē hai, kalīsā mirē āgē*

*ham-pēsha-o-ham-mashrab-o-ham-rāz hai mērā*  
*ghālib kō burā kyūñ kahō, aḥḥā mirē āgē*

The world is but a game that children play before my eyes;  
A spectacle that passes night and day before my eyes

You need not ask how I feel when I am away from you;  
See for yourself how you feel when you are before my eyes.

Faith holds me back: I feel the urge to be an infidel;  
That way the Kaba, and this way, the Church before my eyes.

He shares my calling, shares my ways, he shares my inmost  
thoughts

Do not speak ill of Ghalib; he finds favour in my eyes.

(pp. 170–71)

The section “Poets and Poetic Tradition” should be read along with the above section for continuity. The highlight of this section are the excerpts from Ghalib’s letters which are full of wit, humor and pathos; they are also specimens of the finest prose writing in Urdu. The section “Challenge of the ‘New Light’ ”

explores Muslim ambivalence in the post-1857 era and the tussle between the traditionalists and the modernists. Through a searching analysis of the writings of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan and the verses of Akbar Ilahabadi, Russell recreates the ferment that informed the Aligarh Movement which, in its turn, acted as a catalyst for the production of a considerable body of literature in Urdu.

The last section contains excerpts from Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva's celebrated fictional work, *Umrā'ō Jān Adā*. The selection of the text is quite appropriate inasmuch as it represents the genre of the novel. It also offers readers some insight into the ethos that produced so much that is significant in Urdu culture. However, the section would have gained in perspective if Russell had started with some specimen from a *dāstān* and proceeded through Mir Amman, Sarshar, Nazir Ahmad and Sharar, to Rusva.

In his Introduction, Russell has clearly set out his objectives: fulfilling the needs of non-Urdu readers and the children of Urdu-speaking parents in Europe and America. There is no doubt that they will be squarely met. □

—M. ASADUDDIN  
*Jamia Millia Islamia*

[Reproduced, with thanks, from *Indian Review of Books* (Madras), 16 February–15 March 1996, pp. 34–35; edited for the *AUS*.]

INTIZAR HUSAIN. *Basti*. Translated by FRANCES W. PRITCHETT. With an Introduction by MUHAMMAD UMAR MEMON. Delhi: Indus/HarperCollins Publishers, India, 1995. xxiv, 287 pp. Rs. 95.

AS I READ AND REREAD *Basti* (town, city, neighborhood), I found myself detecting resonances of other writings by Husain, of works by other authors, even of lyrics at considerable remove from the novel. “We are all just prisoners here of our own device,” from the Eagles’ mythic *Hotel California*, perfectly describes for me the experience of Zakir, the protagonist of *Basti*, a man trapped in the memory and remembering of his own histories. By his own histories, I mean not only the sum of experiences that for him constitute his personality and person, but also his particular fashioning of the history—religious, cultural, and psychic—that he shares with others. That chapter seven consists largely of extracts from Zakir’s diary of events, and that Zakir is a professor of history, reinforce the importance of history and make Zakir’s prodigious recollections plausible. And the fact that his very name means “the one who remembers” will certainly be lost on no Urdu reader and is pointed out by Pritchett in the comprehensive glossary (pp. 273–86) that accompanies this controlled and nuanced translation.

Zakir's recollections of Shi'ite and Subcontinental history in particular are mediated, as Memon points out in an excellent Introduction to the volume, by the knowledge that Islamic history "has been one of constant internecine feuds among Muslims for political dominance" (p. vii).<sup>1</sup> This fratricidal history provides the background for a novel that is both a chronicle of and a meditation on the wars that have riven India and Pakistan. It is in this context that the story of Cain's slaying of Abel is evoked by Husain early in the novel (pp. 6–7). Pritchett sells herself short when she says that her use of language reminiscent of the King James Bible only feebly suggests traditional Muslim religious vocabulary (xxii); it is, on the whole, successful, as is her translation overall. Indeed, the novel opens with lovely passages of wonderment and newness, lyrical and fresh (p. 3), ingenuous. In the idyllic context of the city there described, the innocent questions of the young voice are not out of place: "Bi Amma, did elephants once fly?" (*ibid.*).

The writer and critic Salim-ur-Rahman is, however, disappointed. Looking back on Husain's earlier works, he feels that mythic childhood and urban doubt are "repeated here with less vigor and noticeable lack of panache."<sup>2</sup> Other critics take it a step further and accuse Husain of recycling older material, of writing a derivative novel. I think immediately of Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where so much has previously been tapped for its creative energies, and wonder, first, whether it is fair to accuse a creative writer of *autoplagiat*, and second, whether reworking need necessarily be an unproductive exercise. For Memon, *Basti* is "a summation, an ingathering of all those creative strains that have preoccupied Husain since he began writing," with an emphasis on "memory as a principle of healing and integration" and the "same inexorable need to relate to one's deeper self," made urgent in a world of declining morality.<sup>3</sup> For him, the first chapter is a blueprint of the entire novel (p. xi), and the so-called failures (*pace* the critics) of Zakir—to display any demonstrable will, to join or get his childhood sweetheart Sabirah to act—are interpreted by him not as failure but as the demonstration of "how a personality survives in a morally corrupt universe by drawing on its own inner resources" (p. xii).

For me, the first chapter is effective and succeeds—if that is the right

---

<sup>1</sup>This 14-page Introduction (pp. vii-xiv), the 4-page Translator's Introduction (pp. xxi-xxiv), and "A Few English Sources on Intizar Husain" appeared together with the translation of the first chapter of the novel (and the necessary notes and glossary items) in *Edebiyat: The Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures* NS 5: 1 (1994), pp. 125–70.

<sup>2</sup>Muhammad Salim-ur-Rahman, "An Enriched White-Bread Novel," in Muhammad Umar Memon, ed., *The Writings of Intizar Husain*, Special issue of the *Journal of South Asian Literature* 18: 2 (1983), p. 206.

<sup>3</sup>*The Worlds of Intizar Husain: Selected Short Stories* edited with an Introduction by Muhammad Umar Memon (Colorado Springs: Three Continents Press, 1996), p. 4. I am most grateful to Muhammad Umar Memon for having shared his manuscript with me.

verb—on a number of levels. In the first instance, it vividly depicts the life, the city, and the *modus vivendi* of a time past, a time of divinely inspired balance, of cosmic justice and sagacity: “Bibi, when cholera comes the Muslims die, when plague comes the Hindus die” (p. 12). The interweaving of the Hindu and Muslim elements in the novel is reminiscent of passages in O.V. Vijayan’s Malayalam work, where, for instance, Gandharvas sire lustful *‘afārīt*.<sup>4</sup> Throughout, Zakir has recourse to Qur’ānic, Shī’ite, Biblical, Hindu and Buddhist tradition and folklore to help him make sense of the destruction and disintegration around him, but the focus of his reminiscences is very much the ideal city of Rupnagar. Rupnagar is the vortex around which the novel revolves, even if it exists only “in cranial space,” even if it is “pure fiction” (Memon in *The Worlds of Intizar Husain*, p. 33)—but only a fiction in the way Macondo or Malgudi are. It is not so much that Rupnagar does not exist, but that it is the emblem of all those cities of which it is a symbol, traditional cities.<sup>5</sup>

Rupnagar is an emblem also of everything of worth that has been lost: values, balance, commitment, serenity. Eventually, Rupnagar can exist only as part of the unnamed adoptive city in which the novel is set, probably Lahore in late 1971. Zakir says, “In my mind is a prayer for Rupnagar and its people as well, for I can no longer imagine Rupnagar apart from this city. Rupnagar and this city have merged together inside me, and become one town” (p. 167). He concludes: “But I myself am the ruined city. ‘It’s as if my heart is the city of Delhi [Mir’s pun on *dil*]’ ” (p. 207). This need to salvage both (all) cities and this dirge are mirrored in Afzal’s offer to run Pakistan, with Zakir and Irfan as his virtuous arms. Zakir laughs bitterly at this suggestion, to which Afzal dejectedly responds, “Yar, among those disgusting people [who have spoiled the face of Pakistan] we are the only beautiful ones” (204). Intentionally or not, the locution chosen by Pritchett to render this thought, and indeed the tenor of Afzal’s remark, remind me of Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1968) and hints at similarities between Armah’s unnamed protagonist and Zakir.

One of the most beautiful exchanges in the novel takes place between Zakir and Sabirah. They are talking about books. When Zakir tells her how good a particular novel is, Sabirah says, “Zakir, will you bring *Paradise on Earth* for me?” (p. 47). The blissful quality of their childhood interaction, disrupted and ruptured by a separation and fall inseparable from its edenic overtones, is presaged in passages such as:

Just then thunder rumbled in the clouds, scaring them both, and at once

---

<sup>4</sup>*The Legends of Khasak*, tr. O. V. Vijayan (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 25, 10, 176.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Intizar Husain, “The Vanishing Traditional Cities of the Indian Subcontinent,” in *Yatra 4* (1994), pp. 159–69

the rain came down so hard that before they got from the open roof to the staircase they were both drenched. (p. 27)

The critics are dismayed that Zakir fails to (re)connect with Sabirah. For me, this is not a failing of Zakir's or a failure at all, unless one looks at it in a Hollywood or Proppian sense. Should we also criticize Chekhov's protagonist in "The House with the Mansard" for not seeking out Missyuss?

In the first chapter is recounted an exchange between him and Sabirah. When Zakir makes a mud pile, she asks him what he has made, and he answers, "A grave" (p. 25; cf. the grave dug by the crow in the story of Cain and Abel). With "a kind of warmth in her tone" (*ibid.*), she asks him to make her one too and he tells her to do it herself. When she is done, she tells him her grave is better and asks him to test it: "[H]e put his foot forward, and slid it into Sabirah's grave ... And for some time he kept his foot in that soft, *warm* grave" (p. 26; emphasis mine). This significant event he remembers slightly differently when it is recounted in the last chapter: "My foot—in the grave molded by Sabirah's soft white foot. How soft, how *cool*—" (p. 246; emphasis mine). This barely perceptible change belies the importance of the changes that have overcome Zakir, changes already signaled throughout: "When he observed his own non-human walk, the strange thought came to him that it was not he who was walking, but someone else in his place" (p. 132).

Nothing is truly external to Zakir. When his mother tries to prevent him from going out because of the shooting, fires, and insecurity outside, Zakir reflects, " 'That's just fine, let anything happen outside,' he muttered. 'Nothing is happening outside. Everything is happening inside me. Everything that has already happened' " (p. 247).

With Irfan, Zakir has the following exchange, at exactly the mid-point of the novel. I include the meaning of the characters' names for the uncanny dimension it adds to the passage:

"Irfan [knowledge]."

Irfan [knowledge] looked at him [rememberer], but he was *silent*.

"What is it?"

"Yar!" He paused, then said somewhat hesitantly, "Yar, was it good that Pakistan was created?"

Irfan [knowledge] looked at him sharply. "Have you [rememberer], too, been influenced by Salamat [peace]?"

"Not by Salamat [peace], by you [knowledge]."

"How?"

"Once doubt begins, there's no end to it."

Irfan [knowledge] made no reply. He looked at Zakir [rememberer] somewhat angrily, and tightened his lips. Zakir [rememberer] sat in *silence*.

"I *know* one thing," Irfan [knowledge] said at last, "In the hands of the

wrong people, *even right becomes wrong.*" (p. 130; emphases mine)

Husain relies heavily on symbols. Three in particular caught my attention. The first is trees, e.g. "He came back with difficulty from the world of trees" (p. 204), which for me distantly echoes Anis Zaki's closing reverie in Najib Mahfuz's *Ṣarṣara fauqa 'n-Nīl*.<sup>6</sup> Cats are not only a permanent occupant of the café frequented by Zakir and his friends but also present in the following reverie: "A cat standing up on her hind legs opened the door, looked at him intently, and closed the door" (p. 133; cf. Al Stewart's *The Year of the Cat*). And thirdly, monkeys: they overrun the town at the beginning of the novel (pp. 17–20), and Zakir is terrified of being raised on Judgment Day as an ape (p. 252). This symbolism is identified by Javaid Qazi in a 1983 article as typical of Husain's second phase (of three)—the 1960s, where the emphasis is on animal imagery and metaphor. But Husain's emphases in his first and third phases (*pace* Qazi)—the 1950s where it is on social, cultural and religious symbols, and the 1970s where it is on the self and identity—are also important preoccupations in *Basti*: these three emphases merge.<sup>7</sup> Religion is especially significant, as are the notions of collective and individual responsibility.

Sometimes Husain seems to be practicing overkill with his use of symbolism and his quotations from scripture, poetry, and folktales—for instance, in the closing chapters—and one is thus inclined to agree with the view that the novel "drags on for four more chapters" (Memon, *The Worlds of Intizar Husain*, pp. 35, 49). One might even argue that the novel seems to drag for the last *five* chapters, this in spite of the fact that (or because?) chapter seven incorporates the diary section. Indeed, in the one-page preamble to the extracts from the diary, we are treated to a collage of Hindu (Ramayan, 254), Shi'ite (Kufa, 254), Buddhist (Buddha, 255), Persian (Hatim Tai, 256), Qur'anic (Sura 2:201, 256), Urdu (Agha Hajju Sharaf, 257), and Biblical (Eccles. 1:4, 257) motifs, culminating in the 1857 disaster (via Ghalib and Mir) (pp. 252–58).

But this collapse into legends, poetry, scripture and folk memory is not overkill. It is, to borrow Memon's locution, symptomatic of the death of the creative self. No longer able adequately to frame or understand the structures

---

<sup>6</sup>Naguib Mahfouz, *Adrift on the Nile*, tr. Frances Liardet (New York: Doubleday, 1993). Significantly, Husain confesses his interest in trees in "A Conversation between Intizar Husain and Muhammad Umar Memon," tr. Bruce R. Pray, in *Journal of South Asian Literature* 18:1–2 (1983), p. 160.

<sup>7</sup>Javaid Qazi, "The Significance of Being Human in Intizar Husain's Fictional World," in Muhammad Umar Memon, ed., *The Writings of Intizar Husain*, Special issue of the *Journal of South Asian Literature* 18:2 (1983), pp. 1–23. Cf. Memon's taxonomy in "Reclamation of Memory, Fall, and the Death of the Creative Self: Three Moments in the Fiction of Intizar Husain," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13:1 (1981), pp. 73–91.

around himself, Zakir is forced to construct them from the only material he has available. The experience of the walk to the graveyard is thus both a narratological and psychic exercise. Time ceases: “But time doesn’t pass! It keeps passing, but it doesn’t pass” (p. 245). The Syro-Lebanese poet Adunis reflects on the fractured Arab cultural and civilizational existence in similar terms:

The past has ended and yet has not ended.  
(Why does the past end and yet is unending?)<sup>8</sup>

When we realize that Zakir is struggling with unfamiliar variables, within new parameters, under the burden of multiple, disabling histories, the most important charges leveled against him—those of passivity and absence of dynamic will—then become meaningless.

*Basti* is a subtly powerful statement about the Subcontinent, about creation, about the constitution of identities, and about (cultural) memory by a significant author in world literature. It is therefore appropriate that Husain has in Pritchett a translator sensitive to the nuances, references, and allusions of the work. Pritchett’s translation reads very well, fulfills the technical aims she spells out in her introduction, and earns *Bastia* place in the “growing repertoire of good Urdu novels translated into English” (p. xxiii) to which Pritchett refers.

In the hope that this translation will see reprints, I include here a list of minor technical infelicities. I found the following phrases clumsy: “What! Have you put your brains out to pasture?” (p. 4); “This is the season when all my memories are returning” (p. 58); “And there’s just no real end to them” (p. 179). And I had difficulty with “Fellow!” as a term of address (e.g., p. 111). Also: In the acknowledgment for the calligraphy on p. iv, for “fourteen” read “eleven,” there being only 11 chapters; for “He had Surendar” read “He and Surendar” (p. 41, line 25); for “wasn’t be seen” read “wasn’t to be seen” (p. 43, line 33); for “was” read “were” (p. 45, line 8); for “his” read “him” (p. 58, line 10); “had” is superfluous (p. 58, line 21); for “to his” read “of his” (p. 88, line 17); the semicolon is superfluous (p. 113, line 4); for “ear” read “car” (p. 113, line 30); for “is” read “it” (p. 164, line 20); for “faqir’s” read “faqir” (p. 173, line 21); “lamps” should be singular (p. 180, line 33); *Are* would have been clearer if transliterated *Aré* or *Aray* (e.g., p. 148, line 17; p. 151, line 16); “Their” (p. 254, line 3) is unclear; for “take aback” read “taken aback” (p. 261, line 19); for “ghaal” read “ghazal” (p. 269, line 15). □

—SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA  
*University of Mauritius*

---

<sup>8</sup>In his “Muqaddima li-Ta’rikh Mulūk at-Ṭavā’if” [Introduction to the History of the Petty Kings] in *Vaqt bayn al-Ramādva al-Vard* [A Time between Ashes and Roses] (Beirut: Dār al-‘Avda, 1972), pp. 19, 20.

*India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom.* 2 vols. Edited by MUSHIRUL HASAN. Delhi: Lotus, Roli Books, 1995. 256; 280 pp. Rs. 595.

AS THIS MELANCHOLIC CENTURY comes to an end and I think back over the years since 1947, I realize that I am moved by two contrary impulses. I have, like others perhaps, my own private archive of horror. It contains such extensive chronologies of people whose stubbornness and irrationality has added to the grim injustices of our lives, that I am tempted to accept the sad historical verdict that we deserve to perish. Yet, I am also persuaded to believe that we are not always doomed to live as victims or executioners, fools and brutes, by my recollections of stories about events and people which are instinct with pity and thoughtfulness. These stories, I am convinced, have a moral authority; they insist on the possibility of a life of reason and compassion with such clarity that they sustain my longing for the future. Thus, my sense that the emotional and ethical map of our times is made out of massacres, screams and indelible lines of smoke and ash, is modified and sometimes even erased by my willingness to lay a wager on hope and good sense. Without such a double vision, I would either be condemned to live so excessively in the miasma of the past as to look upon everything around me with cynical contempt, or to live in such ignorant bliss as to cease to be a part of *humanitas*.

I suspect that any new historical book, written about the Partition a generation later, must self-consciously possess the kind of two-fold vision I have described, if it is to rise above the trivial accumulation of details and the arrogance of communal politics which characterize many of the accounts written about the Partition. Even as it narrates old nightmares, it should be a book of chronicles which makes an appeal to our sympathetic imagination and reaches out to us like the hand of a survivor who has lived through terror. It should record, console and help us to reconstruct our future. Any other kind of book would only tell us what we already know—that fifty years ago we had armed ourselves with thirsty spears and the names of Gods, and had killed each other for small and pathetic gain. We would then be no wiser than Nirmal Verma's historian who discovered on returning home that the dead he had gone to bury in a graveyard, far from his house and beyond the boundary of the city, were already back and with him once more.

Given the present violence, it has perhaps become urgently necessary to write the kind of complex history of the Partition that I have outlined. Any scholar who wants to undertake such an ambitious project will surely welcome Mushirul Hasan's anthology. It brings together stories, poems, drawings, memoirs, newspaper reports, interviews and excerpts from novels, all drawn from various Indian and Pakistani sources. Many of the writings included in them are disturbing and moving. Some are so distracted by the suffering that they obliterate all distinctions between man and beast; others describe sorrow which is beyond all consolation; and a few others try to retrieve rare shards of humanity



from the rubble. Hasan's purpose, quite obviously, is to use these texts, with their own styles of recording experiences, their own reasons for remembering some events and forgetting others, their own explanations of public acts, to give a shape and a form to the manner in which we think about the Partition.

Unfortunately, however, Hasan's anthology as a whole is neither representative of the ways in which people have recalled what they witnessed and felt during the Partition, nor is it marked by a clearly defined editorial policy. Hasan's admission in the Introduction that the selection is arbitrary exhibits a certain casualness and laxity of approach towards a subject which is of serious civilizational concern to all of us and deserves our most careful attention. Hasan, who has worked for so long in the field of communal politics in India, has simply picked up the most readily available of the sources to compile this anthology, instead of specifically working towards it. The result is a book which has material of value, but which is also marred by inconsistencies, inexplicable omissions and inclusions, awkward translations, and writings which contradict the unitary frame of reference within which the Introduction wants us to read the texts. This is surprising, since Hasan is an acknowledged authority on the history of the Indian national movement and has made major contributions to our understanding of it.

Let me begin with the most obvious of my difficulties. In his Preface (vol. I, p. 11), Hasan makes a few specific claims about the reasons for his selection of material which don't seem to be borne out by what is actually contained in the volumes. One: Hasan says that he has deliberately restricted his choice to writings from English, Hindi and Urdu. The second volume, however, concludes with a translation of Amrita Pritam's famous Punjabi poem, "Aj Akhan Waris Sah Nun" ("I Say Unto Waris Shah").

Two: the presupposition of the anthology is that it will offer samples of writings by Indian and Pakistani writers. Yet, the second volume includes, without any explanation, an anecdotal excerpt by Wilfred Russell, an Englishman, who happened to be in Karachi on 14 August 1947 and met Liaquat Ali Khan. The record of the "pleasant interview" at that liminal moment about future investments is, of course, of some interest. I even admit that we urgently need a scholarly collection of writings about the Partition by British administrators, journalists, historians, army officers and ordinary people who were caught in the maelstrom. But the inclusion of a single piece here seems to be rather pointless.

Three: almost every text included in these volumes was written after the Partition, except the set of poems which open the first volume. Hasan's justification for including them is that they "shed light upon an important aspect of the Pakistan movement" prior to 1947 (*ibid.*, p. 43). There is a vast archive of pre-Partition material—including documents of the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS, and reports on communal riots—which has scarcely been examined to show how religious factions, created to appease private demons, broke apart a world which common sense could have saved. The decision,

therefore, to include four odd poems used to drum-up support for the Muslim League's propaganda is rather strange.

Four: the declared intention of Hasan's anthology is to present the other, the non-official, the human, the anguished face of the Partition. The historical event with which it is concerned is rather sharply defined. I am, therefore, surprised to find that Hasan includes Ali Imam Naqvi's short story, "The Vultures of the Parsi Cemetery," even though it doesn't specifically deal with the division of the country, but with the more general and continuous history of communal riots in the Subcontinent. Given the intrinsic merit of the story, I can sympathize with Hasan's temptation to reprint the story (even though it is easily available in M.U. Memon's anthology *The Colour of Nothingness*), but I think it belongs more appropriately to the history of religious violence in the country than to an anthology about the Partition. Further, I think it is dangerous to include it here without framing it within an appropriate critical commentary, for it suggests that religious lawlessness has become a part of the structure of our societies and that there are no abiding moral assumptions left. A different kind of anthology about communal politics, which is urgently required, would alone give us a more complex understanding of the relation between religion, language, myth and law in the Subcontinent.

My real disappointment with the first volume, which deals primarily with fictional narratives, is that out of the eighteen pieces included in it, nine are easily available in books about the Partition which have been published during the last few years. This is a pity, since it not only duplicates work that has already been done by others, but also prevents Hasan from including examples of work by some of our finest writers on a vast range of complex issues raised by the Partition. Thus, Hasan's anthology would have been richer and more useful if he had chosen a few of the short stories by Intizar Husain that have yet to be translated into English, along with the work of Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Jamila Hashmi, Umm-e Ummara, Ismat Chughtai; or commissioned translations of excerpts from important novels about the Partition like *Udās Naslīn* by Abdullah Hussein, *Āg kā Daryā* by Qurratulain Hyder, *Ṭopī Sukla* by Rahi Masoom Reza (about the politics of the two-nation theory and the Aligarh Muslim University), *Jhūtā Sac* by Yashpal, *Zindagīnāma* by Krishna Sobti (instead of the sentimental short story "The New Regime") or *Lauṭe Hue Musāfir* by Kamleshwar (the only fictional work about Muslims who returned to India after migrating to Pakistan).

I should, perhaps, comment here on the quality of the translations of some of the texts included in the first volume. In his Preface, Hasan approvingly quotes a rather modish theory of translations by Rukmani Bhaya Nair, who claims that a translator should retain a certain "roughness" of texture so that its "unreadability" continuously reminds the reader that the work is a translation (see *ibid.*, p. 11.). I am tempted to retort that, apart from the fact that this is a nice excuse for writing poorly, when I read a translation, I know that I am reading a translation and would rather have my life made easier by dealing with a

“readable” text. Luckily there is a good poet in Nair who refuses to let her believe in her own theory and doesn’t permit her to give us a rough translation of the poems she has rendered into English in the first volume. A.S. Judge, too, violates the editor’s preference for difficult translations and gives us entirely readable English renderings of short stories by Mumtaz Mufti and Fikr Tauswi.

There are, however, eight short stories translated by Jai Ratan which are, without exception and quite unself-consciously, poor in quality. Had Hasan taken the trouble to compare the translations with the originals, he would have discovered that Jai Ratan commits all the sins of a careless translator: he distorts texts, summarizes dialogues, omits passages and renders each tale in a kind of quaint English that our *bābūs* used to write once upon a time. I wish that Hasan, instead of merely picking up the most readily available translations, had made the effort to get the stories by Bhisham Sahni, Vishnu Prabhakar and others freshly translated for his anthology.

Hasan’s own translation of Manto’s “Black Margins” is also problematic. The entire text is composed out of small, terrifying, fragmentary, emblematic fables about an utterly obscene world. Almost every piece is deliberately constructed out of short and broken sentences and arranged in the form of splintered poems so as to offer mutilated images of random violence. Manto offers no explanations for the carnage. He blames no one, but he also forgives no one. He refuses to organize events into a recognizable narrative order because he neither wants to account for change, nor retain a commitment to a society of order, nor promise continuity. What he creates is an unimaginable and scandalous world where victims and predators trade places endlessly and at random.

Hasan’s translation erases the spasmodic, the arbitrary, the subversive quality of the text by converting lines which seem blighted, eroded and on the verge of collapse, into stable prose structures which have a beginning and an end. In so doing, I think, he robs them of their vituperation, their bile, their abusive and slanderous quality. Let me take one example. The original is entitled “Sorry.” The use of the English word is deliberate. Hasan, for some reason, *translates* it as “A Mishtake,” and suppresses the original title.

The Urdu text is arranged as follows:

*Āburī*  
*pēt̄ ĉāk kartī hū’ī*  
*nāf kē nīĉē tak ĉalī gā’ī*  
*izārband kaṭ gayā.*  
*ĉburī mārnēvālē kē*  
*munḥ sē*  
*dafātan*  
*kalīma-e shahādat niklā*

“*čhī, čhī, čhī, ... mishṭēk hō gayā!*”<sup>1</sup>

Hasan’s translation reads as follows:

The knife slid down his groin. His pyjama cord was cut into two. His genitals were exposed. “Chi, chi, chi, I’ve made a *mishṭake*,” the assassin said with a sense of remorse. (vol. I, p. 99)

Apart from the fact that Hasan distorts the form of the original and so changes its experiential meaning, he also adds a line. There is nothing in Manto which could be translated as “His genitals were exposed”—at least not in the text I have.

Further, Hasan abridges the text of “Black Margins” without warning us in his introductory note that he is doing so. Manto’s original is made up of thirty-two small pieces, whereas Hasan only translates twenty-two. As a responsible editor, he should have given some reasons for his decision to truncate the text.

The second volume, which consists mainly of non-fictional narratives, is far superior to the first volume and contains some fascinating material. The excerpts from the autobiography of the poet Josh Milhabadee give us an ironic glimpse of the confusions and the humiliations of a sensitive man who both chooses to migrate to Pakistan out of some abstract notions of Muslim identity, and at the same time feels compelled to stay on in India because his sense of faithfulness to a real, a concrete place which has intellectually nurtured him is strong. Like every exile, he feels that the new country is not home but a place to which he has had to escape. The people around him are Muslims, but they are also strangers with whom he shares no memories. He knows that the land he had once called home, has now become inaccessible and unrecognizably different. While he tries on new identities in quick succession, he also feels that he no longer has a past and is not wanted in the present. The result is that he is both lost and paranoid.

Josh Malihabadee’s dilemma is in sharp contrast to the single-visioned determination of the Islamic scholar Ishitīaq Husain Qureshi to find in Pakistan a paradisiacal alternative to India where Muslims, he insists without much evidence, had always been outsiders. It is ironic, as Hasan appropriately notes, that the place which Qureshi left behind (Delhi and St. Stephen’s College) did him the fine honor of instituting lectures in his name.

Qureshi’s dispassionate stance is radically questioned by the bitter accounts of migrant camps and of abducted women in the other texts (which are supplemented by a few superb drawings by Krishan Khanna). Particularly disturbing is the interview with the social worker, Kamlabehn Patel, who speaks about how women were “sold in the same way that baskets of oranges or grapes are sold or

---

<sup>1</sup>Sa’adat Hasan Manṭō, *Manṭōnumā* (Lahore: Sang-e Mīl Pablikēshanz, 1991), p. 770. —Eds.

gifted” (vol. II, p. 128). Her experiences suggest that the bureaucratization of relief work revictimized those who desperately needed help—the survivors were often bullied into situations which were as humiliating as those which had been created by the Partition.

Perhaps the finest non-fictional narrative in the entire collection is the translation of the diary kept by Begum Anis Kidwai. She was persuaded to work in the Muslim refugee camps by Gandhiji after her husband, Shafi Ahmed Kidwai, a government servant, was killed in the course of organizing relief for Hindu refugees by a religious fool. Anis Kidwai has the kind of double vision I had argued for earlier. Unlike Qureshi, who talks about justice in the abstract and from the perspective of a detached scholar who sees the Partition as the culmination of a historical process, she speaks from the center of life itself where there are pluralities of attachments, unavoidable responsibilities and rights. As she records her grief and her memories of love and, at the same time, calls up all her moral resources to console those who also suffered, she gives us a difficult lesson in practical rationality. Her decision to work in refugee camps after her husband’s murder is an act of piety—a piety which is neither Islamic nor Hindu but in the service of life. Not only does she refuse to seek revenge and so surrender her thoughtful self to the crass vulgarity and stupid bigotry of the killers, she also chooses acts of good-making. It is this complex emotional response, in which inconsolable love and mourning, prayer and hope, coexist, that gives her a tragic grace, and gives us, her latter-day readers who are once again in danger of being enchanted by all that is vile in religious politics, a fine example of dignity and moral courage. □

—ALOK BHALLA

*Central Institute of English  
and Foreign Languages (Hyderabad, India)*

[Gratefully reproduced from the *Indian Review of Books*, 16 November–15 December 1995, pp. 2–4; edited for the *AUS*.]

RALPH RUSSELL *Hidden in the Lute: Two Centuries of Urdu Literature*.  
Manchester: Carcanet, 1995. 312 pp. £25.

IN THIS HELPFUL introductory anthology, Ralph Russell once again demonstrates his remarkable touch as a translator. The present volume pulls together some material that he has published here and there over the years, along with many newly translated pieces. Russell arranges the material more or less by genre: first come “Stories and Sketches,” with stories by Premchand, Ismat Chughtai (two pieces), Rashid Jahan, Krishan Chandar, Manto, and Shaukat Thanavi. These are a mixture of well-known and freshly chosen stories. Then comes a short section

called “Popular Literature” that contains anecdotes about Akbar and Birbal, Mulla Dopiyaza, and Shaikh Chilli, followed by some selections from the *Qaṣaṣu ’l-Anbiyā’*, and concluding with a piece by Khvajah Hasan Nizami. Since *Qaṣaṣu ’l-Anbiyā’* has never received anything like the attention that its continuing popularity and fascinating anecdotes deserve, it is especially satisfying to see that Russell has given us several well-chosen excerpts that capture the tone of the whole work. A section called “Love Poetry” then offers an account of the ghazal, consisting of translated verses interwoven with commentary and interpretation. It is a seductive and delightfully written section: it pieces together verses from various poets, especially Mir and Ghalib, to depict a feudal and sexually-segregated society in which illicit lovers are cruelly persecuted, and poets tend to develop views of mystical but largely non-religious humanism. In an ancillary way, it also evokes other moods and attitudes that feature in the thematic content of the ghazal. In the portion called “Images and allusions” (pp. 165–68), a few examples of references that require cultural background (Khizr, *sāqī*, etc.) are provided and explained. This all makes the verses seem very approachable, and it undoubtedly captures some very real aspects of their charm. A presentation like this is a valuable and admirable feat. I would argue—and I do argue elsewhere in this issue of the *Annual*—that such an approach does not go very deep in its literary analysis of the best individual verses, nor does it do justice to the kinds of appeal the ghazal had for its original creators and audiences. But it undoubtedly *does* make a real success on its own terms, as a work of “outreach” and widespread accessibility. Next is a brief section called “The Challenge of the ‘New Light’,” devoted chiefly to Sir Sayyid and Akbar Illahabadi. Then follows an account called “Poets and the Poetic Tradition,” which is pieced together from Azad, Sharar, Farhatullah Beg, Hali, and Ghalib’s letters. This section makes a welcome addition to the ghazals in translation, since it contains, among other things, some indigenous theoretical material about the ghazal. But theoretical discussion is in any case not the main purpose here, and the complexities of the tradition are, understandably in a work like this, passed over in a few sentences. The volume’s final section, “The Novel,” consists of a long excerpt from *Umṛā’o Jān Adā*. The volume then concludes with “Notes on Writers and Suggestions for Further Reading” and an “Explanatory Index” of terms. Throughout *Hidden in the Lute*, everything is introduced and presented in a way that will offer the greatest possible ease of access; not only people who do not know Urdu, but people who know nothing about Indo-Muslim culture at all, can find in this volume an inviting point of entry. Russell explains everything in the simplest possible way, assuming no literary background or cultural knowledge whatsoever in his readers. To do this in a sustained fashion is a great achievement, and the only people who could possibly think it is easy are those who have never tried it. Surprisingly (to me at least), Russell seems to expect that his readers will make heavy weather even of his quite straightforward translations. Above all, he expects that they will have maximum difficulty appreciating the ghazal. He assures them solicitously, “If you

cannot sustain the necessary effort to banish your sense of the limitations [of the ghazal] you can always give up and, I hope, try again later” (p. 169). But in fact the popular nature of the presentation makes the translations extremely inviting and approachable, as I have indicated. It would be a reader recalcitrant and closed-minded indeed who could claim not to understand them. One can of course point to the price that has been paid for this accessibility. For example, “*falak sē ham kō ‘aish-e rafta kā kyā kyā taqāzā hai*” becomes “We cry to fate, ‘Restore to us the life of ease that once was ours!’” (p. 161). By pinning the meaning down like this, the translation abandons the multivalence of *kyā kyā* (is it exclamatory, interrogative, or negative?) and thus destroys Ghalib’s carefully crafted *ma’ni āfrīnī*. Similarly, “*kō’i ummīd bar nahīn ātī / kō’i šūrat nazar nahīn ātī*” becomes “None of my hopes can ever be fulfilled; / Seek as I may, I see no way ahead” (p. 173). The enjoyable wordplay on *šūrat* that gives *rabṭ* to the verse is completely gone, leaving a trite and uninteresting prose statement. To my mind, the loss of poetic depth and resonance in these cases is considerable. But then, Ghalib and Mir do this to all us translators: they force us to choose among painful and unsatisfactory alternatives. The multivalent meanings lost in translation can be addressed by footnotes, but that simply imposes a different kind of price. At least Russell, unlike so many lesser translators, gets value for his sacrifices: the losses are undoubtedly there, but the gains in accessibility are also palpable. The present volume comes in a way as the second half of a set, for the dust jacket describes the author’s most recent previous book, *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History* (1992), as “a critical companion to this major anthology.” The two volumes do indeed have many qualities in common, and taken as a whole they do their author great credit. Ralph Russell is an excellent translator and a knowledgeable and experienced interpreter of Urdu literature; *Hidden in the Lute* is a fine addition to his oeuvre. □

—FRANCES W. PRITCHETT  
Columbia University

ZEESHAN SAHIL. *Karāčī aur Dūsrī Nazmēñ*. Karachi: Āj ki Kitābēñ, 1995. 164 pp.  
Rs. 100.

WHEN KARACHI was convulsing in what seemed like its death throes earlier in 1995, Zeeshan Sahil, the poet, was busy churning out poems that bear not only testimony to his sensitive soul but to his rare ability to convey the most complicated thoughts in a few simple words. His latest collection of poetry, *Karāčī aur Dūsrī Nazmēñ*, comprises poems written between May and August 1995—perhaps the most turbulent period in Karachi’s recent history. What is remarkable about this collection is not the fact that Sahil has managed to produce seventy beautiful

poems in such a short time, but the fact that he has refused to succumb to the journalistic influences that usually creep into such works.

Zeeshan Sahil had, with his three earlier works—*Arēnā*, *Āryōn kā Shōr*, and *Kubr-ālūd Sitārē*—already established himself as a poet of considerable merit. His evocative imagery and simple language revealed a man who was not afraid of tender emotions and whose whimsical flights of fancy culminated in beautiful poems. But whereas his earlier collections were a celebration of life with all its happiness and ironies, the latest book goes one step beyond and captures the despair of a city perpetually at war with itself. He derives his images from daily life—forgotten objects that seem to have disappeared from the cityscape because they don't make any headlines, don't fit into any political agenda—and he spins little yarns about them, giving them a life of their own. In a poem called “*Hartāl*” (Strike), he describes the now familiar images of a strike—burning houses, snipers, deserted roads—and then goes on to give a beautiful description of the flowers, the birds, the clouds, and what they did on the day of the strike. In another poem, “*Dōst*” (Friend), the city appears with its hands burned up to the elbows, offering us its friendship; but it is spurned.

What gives Zeeshan Sahil's poetry a decisive edge is his acute sense of irony. In one poem titled “*Mukālimā*” (Dialogue), he raises the question of whether policemen are more sensitive than poets:

*jis shehr mēn shā'irōn kī ābādī*  
*fī murabba' kilōmīṭar sab sē ziyāda hō*  
*vahān polisvālē*  
*shā'irōn sē ziyāda ḥassās hō saktē haiñ*  
 In a city where there are more poets per square kilometer  
 than anywhere else  
 police are likely to be more sensitive  
 than poets

and goes on to add:

*main khvāb dekhtā hūñ*  
*aur unḥīñ mēn rahtā hūñ*  
*fī murabba' kilōmīṭar*  
*polisvālōn sē ziyāda*  
*shā'irōn kī ābādīvālē*  
*zila' vasṭī kī ḥudūd mēñ*  
 I see dreams  
 and live in them  
 where there are more poets per square kilometer  
 than police  
 in district central



The poems are interspersed with illustrations by Nafisa Shah, a *Newsline* staffer. Her trademark distorted figures occasionally overlap with the cityscape lending the book an eerie quality. The book has been tastefully produced and includes a brief but moving Foreword by the poet. It is dedicated to veteran journalist Zamir Niazi who returned his Pride of Performance award in protest against the ban of Karachi's Urdu evening papers and the government's gross indifference to the Karachi situation. □

—MUHAMMAD HANIF  
*Columnist, Newsline (Karachi)*